A Lady's Agreeable Irish Sketch Book

MRS. T. P. O'CONNOR, who was born in Texas and lived thirty years in London before she visited Ireland in 1916, fell deeply in love with the Emerald Isle in six weeks, and has now given us her impressions of the country and its people in a volume bearing the somewhat mysterious title, *Herself—Ireland*. She went to Dublin immediately after the collapse of the Sinn Fein rebellion; and the city still bore numerous and painful traces of the dreadful work of the misguided men involved in that mad political enterprise. The insurrection, however, spared the historic portions of the city, and, while the author finds loneliness unbearable in New York, she discovered a peculiar charm in Dublin which rendered loneliness there not only possible, but even restful and agreeable.

It is not worth while to revive recollections of one of the most miserable disasters in the history of Ireland by reviewing the chapter on the Rebellion of 1916; so we pass on to what the author has to say of old Dublin and the famous and interesting characters associated with the Irish capital. Among the eminent men born there were Edmund Burke, Sir Philip Francis, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Henry Grattan, Thomas Moore and Michael Balfe, the composer.

Dublin and Handel.

We seldom think of Dublin as a music loving city, yet here it was that Handel conducted the rehearsals for the first performance of *The Messiah*, which was given at the New Musick Hall in Fishamble street, in April, 1741. The Dublin *Evening Post* thus recorded the event: "On Tuesday last Mr. Handel's oratorio of *The Messiah* was performed at the New Musick Hall, Fishamble street. The best judges allowed it to be a most finished piece of musick."

This was faint praise for a work destined to immortality in the musical world; yet it satisfied Handel, as appears from a letter to a London friend, in which he wrote: "The nobility did me the honour to make among themselves a subscription for six nights which did fill a room of six hundred persons, so that I did not need to sell a single ticket at the door and, without variety, the performance was received with general approbation."

The famous Four Courts and the handsome Custom House appeal to Mrs. O'Connor as the most picturesque buildings in Dublin; but she is most enthusiastic over the Municipal Gallery and the paintings there, because of her admiration for the character of its director, the late Sir Hugh Percy Lane, whom she saw for the last time in New York the evening before he sailed for home on the doomed *Lusitania*. No man of his time did more for the revival of Irish art than Sir Hugh Lane. An unerring judge of the authenticity and real value of pictures, he was most generous in devoting his time and talents to the service of collectors and artists, in assisting them to buy wisely or to sell advantageously. He gave so generously to the Municipal Gallery of Dublin that no wonder Mrs. O'Connor suggests that its name should be changed to Hugh Lane's Gift Gallery!

Those Slums—and Those People.

Mrs. O'Connor, in common with other newcomers generally, was shocked by the slums of Dublin; but not even the slums, she declares, when you once get away from them, can affect the charm of the city. The courtesy of the operators of the public conveyances comes in for special praise. She is immensely pleased by the protestations of a tram car conductor who, observing her plump proportions as she hastens toward his car, calls out: "Ah, sure, don't hurry, lady; we'll wait for you." The present writer can testify to similar kindliness in Denver and American cities further West; but it is not common in our Eastern cities. Mrs. O'Connor, however, believes that the same thing would have been said to her in Charleston or in New Orleans.

This was far surpassed, she goes on to say, by the indulgence of a ticket agent who allowed her to travel from Kingstown to Dublin without producing her ticket, upon her simple statement that she had lost it; and the still more remarkable conduct of a Dublin waiter who actually refused to take a tip! This young man escorted her from the station to her hotel late one evening when no taxis could be procured; and having ascertained on the way that she was a lady from America, where his sweetheart had gone, he declined to accept the two shilling piece which our author pressed upon him when they arrived at the Shelbourne.

'Tis a Gra-a-nd Hotel.

Mrs. O'Connor confirms the recollection of the present writer as to the excellence and attractiveness of this famous hostelry, of which it is said that if you stay there long enough you will meet everybody in the world whom you have ever known. She made friends there with a pigeon, which used to come regularly to the outer sill of the window to be fed.

This reminds us of the pigeons of the late Sir William Kennedy, one of the Judges of the King's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice in England. At the room connected with his chambers in the New Law Courts in London, in which he sometimes entertained American friends at luncheon, he was visited every day by a flock of about a dozen pigeons, which came to the window regularly at the same hour daily, to be fed with maize, as he preferred to call our Indian corn. He kept the grain in a drawer under the window and the pigeons were fed by an attendant in his absence. Mr. Justice Kennedy had inherited these pigeons from his predecessor on the bench, who, when he retired, made his successor promise to continue feeding them.

St. Patrick's in Dublin.

In a chapter on Dean Swift Mrs. O'Connor praises St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, in which Thackeray, writing in 1842, found so little to admire. "The interior of the cathedral," said Thackeray, "to an Englishman who has seen the neat and beautiful edifices of his own country, will be anything but an object of admiration. The greater part of the huge building is suffered to remain in gaunt decay, and with its stalls of sham Gothic and the tawdry old rags and gimcracks of the most illustrious order of Saint Patrick, looks like a theatre behind the scenes." The only thing Thackeray found to praise in the cathedral was "a bass singer whose voice is one of the finest ever heard." Since then, however, namely in 1865, St. Patrick's has been completely restored; so we may easily understand why Mrs. O'Connor found it admirable although Thackeray did not.

"The great Latin Cross," she says, "demonstrates a mind of wonderful mathematical knowledge and accuracy, being finer and more exquisitely exact than any cathedral in England." The intimation here that there is a mathematical standard of exactitude for the construction of a Latin cross is new to us. In the same chapter Mrs. O'Connor recalls the fact that Celbridge Abbey, where Swift used to meet Miss Vanhomrigh in "Vanessa's Bower," belonged to the father of Thomas Dongan, the Governor of New York who gave the colony its most famous charter and afterward went home to become the Earl of Limerick. We note that in Scott's *Life of Swift* this estate is denominated "Marley Abbey, near Celbridge." Mrs. O'Connor tells us that this honored house has now passed into the hands of appreciative Americans.

A Paragon of Dealers.

We are not accustomed to think of Ireland as the home of great dealers in rare and beautiful furniture or of the Irish as skilful makers thereof, but Mrs. O'Connor devotes a chapter to *Hicks, a Man Without Price*, who appears to be a wonder in both respects. After frankly expressing her doubt as to whether there was a scrupulously honest and trustworthy dealer in antiques in the world she became satisfied that Hicks of Lower Pembroke street in Dublin was such a man. His father made chairs which rank with the products of Chippendale, Sheraton or Heppelwhite, and he is not only a maker and a purchaser of furniture for the nobility and gentry of the United Kingdom but for royalty as well. His copies of old pieces are marvels of fidelity to the originals. He was asked by a gentleman to visit his country place to pass judgment on the art treasures gathered there. Coming to a beautiful French table, his host said: "Don't take the trouble, Hicks, to fix your copying eye on that old table; it's beyond you. The green inlay was only done to perfection in the time of Marie Antoinette." Hicks ran his hand over the lovely inlaid ribbons and responded: "No, sir; I made this table."

Sir Arthur Blank Blanks.

"Hicks, you're a liar!" retorted Sir Arthur Blank.

"I may be," Hicks replied, "but not about this table." He then went on to tell how the original was offered for sale at Christie's in London but fetched a higher price than he could give; how he measured it and sketched and took in all its fine points with his eyes, and how he afterward made four just like it, of which the table before them was one. "Well, I'm damned!" said Sir Arthur, who had given a large sum for the table as being the genuine thing. "Are you sure this isn't a fairy story?" Hicks told him to turn over the table and he would find an "H" scrawled in the ebony near one of the legs; and sure enough the letter was there. We must infer that Hicks did not put it on the market as a veritable antique; otherwise Mrs. O'Connor could hardly praise him as she does.

Unusual Ghosts.

Mrs. O'Connor has many stories to tell of the ghosts which haunt Donerail Court in the County Cork, among the apparitions there being nine green cats! But there is a true story about Donerail which is even more interesting. In 1713 the local Freemasons' lodge was accustomed to meet in a room in the castle. The Hon. Elizabeth St. Leger occupied an adjoining apartment, to which repairs were being made; and an aperture had been left through which she inadvertently witnessed the secret proceedings of the lodge. "After a consultation of the members they decided the best way out of the difficulty was to make the eavesdropper a Freemason. Doubtless she made a very creditable one, for her portrait represents a strong minded lady, painted in a Freemason's apron, with her hand resting on the open page of the Book of Mysteries and her finger pointing to an important chapter." Apropos of this incident, Mrs. O'Connor tells the following story of a southern lady who also became a Freemason:

"She was a young, beautiful bride, the wife of a distinguished Confederate officer, and her plantation lay directly in the route of Sherman's march to the sea. All houses were to be burned, she was alone, the fate of the women was uncertain; to give her protection her husband asked that she should receive the first degree of the order of Freemasons. This is probably the only instance of a woman Freemason in America."

In her preface, which she calls *An Apology*, Mrs. O'Connor mysteriously says, "I am a writer of necessity—not of talent." We cannot concur in the second clause of this statement; for only a writer of talent could have put together such a record of personal impressions and entertaining anecdote and gossip about one of the most interesting countries in the world.

HERSELF—IRELAND. By Elizabeth P. O'Connor (Mrs. T. P. O'Connor). Dodd, Mead & Co. $2.50.